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SUBJECT: K+1 ? FOCUS ON SERBIA'S FUTURE - A/S FRIED IN
BELGRADE MARCH 5 AND 6

ARTICULATING A FUTURE VISION

1. (C) Dan, you are returning to a Serbia much like the one you found less than a year ago: uncertainty over government vision and direction and denial of the Kosovo reality. The country's leadership offers very little perspective for the future to its citizens. The penultimate phase of Vienna Kosovo talks is now over and -- as predicted -- yielded no substantive results. Politicians continue to focus on what they don't want for what they call 15 percent of Serbia (Kosovo's territory) and not on what they plan to achieve in the remaining 85 percent.

2. (C) A month after parliamentary elections, there is no new coalition government in sight. The sole act of the newly elected parliament has been to convene briefly to overwhelmingly denounce the Ahtisaari proposal. Calling the U.S. the driving force behind the Ahtisaari plan, PM Kostunica's DSS Party, along with Radicals and Socialists, bussed in many of the nearly 20,000 people who demonstrated on February 27 in front of our Embassy.

3. (C) Unfortunately, all of this is as predicted and will run its course. Your visit should again focus on the way ahead for Serbia -- together with us and Europe -- and your speech at the Belgrade City Hall is just the vehicle to do so. I firmly believe Serbs want to ?fit? and want to be ?a more normal country.? In my view, their leaders misinterpret the people's understandable lack of jubilation over the impending loss of Kosovo as an existential question for the average Serb. It is not. It is, however, an ideal political football for Serbia's favorite pastime -- conspiratorial politics.

4. (C) For Kostunica and other nationalists, the Kosovo issue provides just the right mix of emotion to feed their own personal convictions as well as their individual political goals. In contrast, Tadic's focus on Serbia's Euro-Atlantic vocation lacks strength and emotional appeal because he too feels he must play the nationalist card in the end. His nemesis, the DS breakaway Liberal Democratic Party, is the only political group prepared to concede that Kosovo is lost and that Serbia has more important things to work on. But the Liberal Democrats lack impact, partly due to the personalities of some of their leaders and also because they are only a small dissenting voice in a nationalist wilderness.

HOT AIR IN VIENNA

5. (C) The newly re-empowered GOS negotiators went to Vienna promising constructive engagement, but instead have categorically rejected most of Ahtisaari's plan. Their proposed amendments countered any hints of independence for the province, and added an unhelpful proposal for a

"Serbian entity" within Kosovo. Both Tadic and Kostunica continue in unison to vow that Belgrade will never recognize an independent Kosovo. Tadic's private assurances of reasonableness in a K+1 aftermath are of course absent in public.

NO MOVEMENT ON GOVERNMENT FORMATION

¶6. (C) Coalition negotiations have gone nowhere so far. A cohabitation arrangement between DS (Tadic), DSS (Kostunica), and G-17 Plus (former Finance Minister Dinkic) is the inevitable ultimate outcome if a government forms without renewed elections. Both DS and DSS are claiming rights to the PM post, which provides the key element of power in the government. If the two parties are unable to resolve this dispute by May 15, Tadic will have to call new elections, which would continue the paralysis of the government, keep Kostunica's hand on the reins as caretaker PM, and depress democratic voter turnout in follow-on elections.

¶7. (C) Despite the clamor, Kosovo policy plays only a tangential role in the government talks, as all major political parties, save the Liberal Democrats, generally share a common stance on the province. Kostunica, after briefly floating an aggressively rejectionist Kosovo platform that threatened ties to most NATO allies in the event of Kosovo's independence, has since retreated to the old common position among Serbia's political parties -- that Serbia rejects independence for Kosovo and expects a negotiated settlement agreeable to all sides on the basis of the UN Charter and UNSCR 1244. Kostunica and Tadic have pinned their hopes on EU disunity on Kosovo and ultimately a Russian veto in the UNSC.

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YOUR MEETINGS: TADIC

¶8. (C) Tadic continues to assure us privately that while he must take a tough public stand on Kosovo's independence, he will ultimately react responsibly to such an outcome. That said, he does not like the Ahtisaari plan and quietly hopes, just like Kostunica, that the Russians will scuttle a new UNSCR. You might plant the seed in his head that a Russian veto in New York would actually be a bad outcome for Serbia and for Tadic himself, who might then have to face other diplomatic steps and a far more volatile and dangerous Kosovo reality.

¶9. (C) Tadic will tell you that ICTY cooperation will be a top priority for his government, and that he continues to firmly support military cooperation, up to and including NATO membership. He needs to hear that we expect him to lead a constructive public reaction to a Kosovo status settlement. You should lay out redlines on expected reactions to Kosovo's independence, including the need for the GoS to be proactive in using its influence to quell potential flare-ups in northern Kosovo and to refrain from directly or indirectly encouraging the exodus of Serbs from Kosovo. You should applaud his proactive work instructing his Army Chief to liaise with NATO to keep communication lines open between the Serbian military and KFOR (which he has done) and encourage more of the same.

¶10. (C) You should also press him to do more to operationalize the PfP relationship he lobbied hard for in advance of the elections, by helping move Serbia's PfP Presentation Document forward and by pushing for Serbia to open its office in NATO HQ by signing a Security Document. On both counts, his advisors have stalled action, telling a recent visiting delegation from NATO that nothing should move before a government is formed.

KOSTUNICA

¶11. (C) Kostunica was unprepared and rambling during his most recent meeting with Frank Wisner, which, along with his missteps on the initial DSS platform on Kosovo, suggest he is not sure how to proceed on Kosovo other than to stick to strict rejectionism. His grasping at straws to try to intimidate the international community by threatening the damaging of ties with NATO allies backfired. But fresh off what he sees as a victory in the ICJ in the Bosnia genocide ruling, he has now hinted at lawsuits against any country that recognizes an independent Kosovo. I think you should rebut his belief that our decisions on Kosovo will mean big trouble for us. You should make clear to him that Serbia's future is in his hands and the hands of other democratic leaders. The United States and our European partners are confident in our support for Ahtisaari and a future settlement. What Serbia does in reaction will have its greatest interest on Serbia, not on the international community. It is important that you at least mention the ICTY issue; he will interpret silence as an indication that this issue is no longer of any importance to us.

DRASKOVIC

¶12. (C) You will also meet with outgoing FM Vuk Draskovic. While he will have to leave government after a poor showing in elections, we have encouraged Draskovic -- an engaging personality who is genuinely pro-American -- to remain a factor in Serbian politics. You should probe to see how much he is willing to do to move the Euro-Atlantic agenda forward in his remaining time at the helm, inter alia by supporting the movement of the PfP Presentation Document into the government for consideration.

YOUR SPEECH

¶13. (C) Your speech will actually be the centerpiece theme of your visit. We cannot hammer out often enough ?Possibilities for 21st Century Partnership.? Your remarks will get wide media coverage and push once again the elite and a new generation of Serbs to help reorient Serbia away from introspective nihilism and start looking at a global partnership role that will contribute to the country's success. Ultimately, only Serbs can lead Serbia out of its self-destructive behavior of the recent decades. But we can continue to help point them in the right direction.

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